

Space Race

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**OFFICIAL MEMBER
MAGAZINE**

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Up And Away

NASCAR meets NASA in special visit

There are technological marvels today that could only be dreamed of in the not to distant past. If you were around in the 1960s, you remember it was a turbulent decade. The shining moments for the era, and for that matter, American history, were delivered by NASA. In the summer of 1969, NASA delivered on President John F.

Kennedy's challenge for Americans to walk on the moon, and return safely to earth.

Those who lived in Dayton, Ohio, at the time had a special interest in the Apollo 11 flight. After all, the Wright Brothers built their first flying machines at their Dayton bicycle shop, and Neil Armstrong, the first man to step onto the lunar surface was from just up the road in Wapakoneta.

Although most households had their first color TVs, the pictures from the moon were grainy black and white. And while Walter Cronkite guided his TV viewers through the amazing events on the moon, kids ran into their yards to gaze at the moon, to see if they noticed anything different.

If you were born after 1969, say, 1972, you didn't get to experience Armstrong's and Buzz Aldrin's strolls on the moon, or remember that Michael Collins, the third member off the team, remained aboard the command module, named Columbia.

Of course, if you were born in 1972, you were born the year that President Richard Nixon was re-elected in a landslide victory over George McGovern. You would be old enough to remember the first Space Shuttle (the orbiter was also named Columbia, and was tragically lost in 2003) launch in 1981.

This brief study of the space program helps out into context the journey to Florida's Kennedy Space Center by NASCAR Busch Series driver Ashton Lewis, and more recently by fellow driver David Green. Other NASCAR stars have visited KSC over the years.

In today's world, however, sometimes a brief pause is necessary to reflect and appreciate the pioneers of American space exploration. Ashton and David certainly gained an enhanced appreciation for NASA, and more importantly the people of NASA. Personal experience is always the best teacher, isn't it?

The thought that today, little boys and little girls can dream of being an astronaut or a race car driver is probably even neater than it was in the 1960s. And when NASA and NASCAR folks have a chance to get together, it's really cool.

We hope you'll enjoy this month's cover story, as told by Rick Houston.

Paul C. Schaefer



Senior Editor



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Out Of This World



Ashton Lewis enjoys all-access tour of Kennedy Space Center

By Rick Houston

One of the first things to strike a visitor to Kennedy Space Center is the sheer enormity of everything – from the crawler used to transport the Space Shuttle from the Vehicle Assembly Building to the launch pad. And then there's the VAB itself, a building so gigantic that clouds have been known to form in the top of the hangar-type building and drop rain on those below.

NASCAR Busch Series driver Ashton Lewis is no different, being in awe of his surroundings at KSC. Lewis, who is entering his fourth full season of competition in 2004, was treated to a rare VIP tour of KSC Nov. 12, 2003. The trip included a tour inside the Space Shuttle

Atlantis, the VAB, NASA's engine room, the crawler, one of the launch pads and the firing room.

"The biggest thing that impressed me about everything was the size of everything," Lewis says. "Everything had to be engineered and designed to withstand unbelievable forces."

Generally, Lewis saw a few similarities between NASA and his own family-owned NASCAR Busch Series operation.

"They deal with saving weight," Lewis says. "They deal with a lot of the same areas that we try to improve. Obviously, their budgets are a lot bigger than ours. If they're not using it and don't have it, there's a good chance it's not

really around."

Words probably couldn't do justice to what it must have been like to crawl through the hatch of Atlantis. That was after clearing security at the Orbiter Processing Facility, taking an air shower and putting on a "bunny" suit (similar to a surgeon's gown and cap and mask) – all prerequisites for getting inside the Shuttle.

"The coolest thing about it was to be able to be in the one that was scheduled to go up next, just to get inside of it and see how they live, see what they see," Lewis says.

Once on board Atlantis, Lewis was treated to a full tour. On the flight deck, he was allowed to sit in the commander's left-hand seat. It got



NASCAR Busch Series driver Ashton Lewis sits in the mission commander's left-hand seat of the Space Shuttle Atlantis as it sits in the Orbiter Processing Facility at Kennedy Space Center in Florida. It got his attention. "That was very impressive to see all the different systems they have, the subsystems, all the back-up systems that they have. And to have to understand and be able to monitor and control it, those guys are busy."



Lewis tours the Vehicle Assembly Building or the VAB, a building so gigantic that clouds have been known to form in the top of the hangar-type building and drop rain on those below. Lewis is shown around the cavernous building by NASA's Manny Virata Jr. of the Communications Department.

his attention.

"I'd taken a couple of flight lessons before I went [to KSC]," Lewis says. "The systems they monitor, I know the computer does a lot of it, but they still have to be trained to understand



Lewis gets an up close and personal look at the "facilities" in the mid-deck crew quarters. Spacecraft Operator Lisa Davis shows him the foot rests that can be pulled down. Lewis said, "You don't think about things like toilets needing to have handles so you don't float up."

how to manually do all that. That was very impressive to see all the different systems they have, the subsystems, all the backup systems that they have. And to have to understand and be able to monitor and control it, those guys are busy."

While in the orbiter, Lewis met Les Hanks, a mechanic and electrician in its forward section. Hanks, to put it mildly, is a race fan. He's been to every Daytona 500 since 1989, many of Daytona International Speedway's Budweiser Shootout and Gatorade 125-mile qualifying races, plus several NASCAR Busch Series and NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series events to boot.

Inside what is arguably the world's most complicated piece of machinery isn't exactly where Lewis was expecting to find a hard-core race fan.

"Not really - if you think about what they get to play with and what they get to work on," Lewis says. "To think that somebody that has to deal with all that is a race fan, that was pretty cool."

How did Hanks become a NASCAR convert? All it took was attending that very first race back in 1989.

"The thing I remember the most about that day is the chills from hearing, 'Gentlemen, start your engines,' and feeling the rumble," Hanks says. "I was hooked."

Hanks later visited Daytona during the NASCAR Busch Series portion of Preseason Thunder, where he again hooked up with Lewis. During the visit, the 15-year veteran of the space program saw distinct similarities between his job on the Shuttle and what NASCAR Busch Series crews do to tweak that last little bit of speed out of their cars.

"My job on the Shuttle requires everything to be done exactly right for the particular system I am working on to function properly," Hanks continues. "Watching the race teams practice at Daytona was a lot like performing maintenance on the Shuttle. Each race team had a particular outcome they were looking for, and if it wasn't right, they retested. Sometimes, again and again, which is the way it is in the Shuttle business, too. Watching the mechanics and drivers converse on problems to achieve the best results with an eagerness for perfection is exactly how the Space Shuttle team works to prepare for a launch."

Awesome though the Shuttle was, the tour was far from over.

"The launch pad area, to me, was kind of second behind the orbiter," Lewis says. "To go out there and see all the design and all the thought that had to be taken into account there was incredible. To see the fencing around it, to see the blasts it had taken from the debris

flying was impressive.

"The whole area around the launch pad was basically like a surgical room when they got ready to launch the spacecraft. It's those little small details that I had never thought of, and I'm sure the general public never thinks about, that is involved in launching one of the Shuttles up into space."

The attention to detail is something Lewis likes to see in his race team.

"I've always been under the belief that what separates the really good teams from the also-rans is the details," Lewis says. "It's the little stuff that makes a difference. If you take the time to really pick apart everything and make sure everything's correct, that's the team that's going to succeed, as opposed to [a team that doesn't pay attention to detail]."

And there was - and then the - and the -

"The coolest thing about it was to be able to be in the [space shuttle] that was scheduled to go up next."

Ashton Lewis

the sights came almost too fast to comprehend.

"I liked the engine shop," Lewis says. "I thought that was really neat the way they had it set up. You had the engine, basically, above the first [floor] where the exhaust [bell] was. The way they had it set up to work was really well thought out. It was basically just as clean as any engine shop [in NASCAR]."

Finally, the tour was over and Lewis headed back to Homestead, for the weekend's NASCAR Busch Series season finale. As it turned out, the trip to KSC might've been something of a

good luck charm. Lewis scored a fifth-place finish in the event, one of his best runs of the season.

Lewis used the effort as an incentive during the offseason.

"It was very good, because people don't realize that winter is our busiest time of the year," Lewis says. "Everybody's so excited to get to Daytona, just because it means you're out of the shop and all the hard work over the winter is finally done - or you're to a point where you're back to kind of normal hours."

"[The good finish] makes the winter that much easier. Obviously, sponsorship would've made it a whole lot easier. To finish the year the way we did, actually the last eight races starting at Dover, we really turned our program around. We capped it off at Homestead. That was a big plus for us." **NAR**

NASA plays host to David Green

By Jeff Armstrong

A NASCAR Busch Series driver made a central Florida side-trip during Daytona's season opening speedweeks. David Green, driver of the No. 37 Timber Wolf Chevrolet, was treated to a behind-the-scenes look at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla.

The tour was led by Tom Overton, who's been with NASA since 1966. The visit to Kennedy Space Center was a payback of sorts, after David Green and the Timber Wolf crew treated Tom to quite an experience at NASCAR Busch Series testing at Daytona International Speedway in January.

"We were fortunate to be able to spend time with him and see the excitement on his face when we took him around the track in the pace car," said Green. "I know he took the stories he had from that day with us back to the people at NASA, which will probably help us make some new fans for the sport, and that's always a good thing."

"For Tom to open up like that and paint a picture of how many people at NASA are race fans was great, and we got to show how we are space fans. The people's enthusiasm about what we do in racing shows just how popular the NASCAR Busch Series has become, that people at NASA knew about us."

The tour began with a visit to the building



Green

that currently houses Space Shuttle Discovery. After visiting with NASA employees, Green was given the opportunity of a lifetime when he was invited into the Shuttle cockpit. As Green prepared to climb in, he found on the wall surrounding the shuttle door signatures of people who had crawled through this same space in the past. At a closer glance, the signatures of Kalpana Chawla, Rick Husband and Willie McCool, three of the astronauts who perished on Columbia just over a year ago were found. The signatures were dated June 8, 2002, just a few months before they would launch from the Cape.

A gentleman by the name of Rene, whose

job before launch is to help strap the astronauts in, offered to let David sign any area in the crawl space, and he chose to seize the chance by signing "David Green, 1994 Busch Champion, and Hopefully 2004!"

David also had plenty of chances to practice his autograph as he signed cards for the NASA employees who came up to him throughout the tour. Each time David stopped to sign one card, several more people would come up to him, making it clear that the NASCAR Busch Series has made an impression on the NASA community.

The tour continued at the Vehicle Assembly Building, where the Shuttle is turned to a vertical position, and the solid rocket boosters and external tank are attached. Next they moved down the three-mile path that the shuttle travels from the assembly building to the launch pad, a trip that takes the shuttle more than eight hours to complete.

"It's not like I've been a space fan all my life, it's just never been at the top of my agenda," said Green. "Ever since Saturday, Diane [Green's wife] and I, along with our kids, have wanted to learn more about the program. I just think it's so cool and we only got the tip of the iceberg. I know that if other people had the opportunity that we had on Saturday, they would want to learn more about NASA too."

- To learn more about NASA, visit www.nasa.gov